

CROESUS KING OF LYDIA

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Rev. C. Lavington Reynolds
from his affectionate nephew
The Author.

Croesus, King of Lydia

A DRAMA

BY

L. GORDON RYLANDS, B.A., B.Sc.

εἴτα δῆτ' ὄγκονύμεθα
οὐ μέν τις ἡμῶν πλουσίοις ἐν δώμασιν,
οὐδὲ ἐν πολίταις τίμιος κεκλημένος.
τὰ δὲ ὄνδεν · ἄλλως φροντίδων βουλεύματα,
γλώσσης τε κέμποι.

Euripides.

1902



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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Croesus, King of Lydia.

Atys, Son of Croesus.

Adrastus, Son of Gordius, King of Phrygia.

Solon of Athens, one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece.

Bias of Priene, one of the Seven Wise Men of Greece.

Aesop, a Visitor at the Court of Croesus.

Sardanis, a Lydian Nobleman.

First Mysian.

A Messenger.

An Officer.

Hesione, Daughter of Sardanis.

Nurse.

Soldiers, Attendants, Maidens, &c.

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CROESUS, KING OF LYDIA

SCENE I.

A Room in the Palace of Croesus at Sardis. Enter Solon and Aesop.

Solon.

Aesop! I grow aweary of this placé;
Frivolity and flattery and sport
Fill up the time, but fill it even so
As air a box, which is but empty still.
He who to wisdom would allegiance give,
Unmixed and undivided, fits as ill
With kings and courtiers, as in wheeling sport
The ant or toiling bee with summer flies.

Aesop.

Yet is such converse not unprofitable
To one who makes a study of mankind:

Here is a stage where we may see displayed
Each passion, vice, and folly in its turn;
No scene of grandeur truly, yet from such
Observant minds may no small profit win.
But he who would explore these mysteries
And reach the hidden secrets of these shows,
Must learn the language of the place, so steep
His character in its pervading air
As to become himself a part of it;
And be in his society dissolved
As salt in water; thou art like the rock
Which never will be mingled with the waves,
But roughly shocks them when they meet with it.
Kings do not such unyielding temper love,
And Croesus more than most it must offend,
Who never met refusal or rebuff,
Or adverse fortune; from the Grecian sea
To where the stream of swerving Halys rolls,
Men bow before him and revere his power;
The very rivers golden tribute pay,
And earth her bosomed treasures for him opens.
Such wealth and might as his are never schooled
To suffer contradiction, or accept
Advice with patience: blunt and honest words
Like thine beat icily on royal minds.

Solon.

'Tis true. I see full well my sojourn here
Grows irksome to the King. I cannot frame
The flatteries for which his daily fare
Has bred an appetite. This very day
He bade attendants guide me through the rooms
Wherein he keeps his gold, and in my view
Set all his treasure forth: he now expects
Doubtless my praise of his felicity;
But never to my mind excessive wealth
Appeared a blessing; nor, to please a King,
Will my tongue utter what my thoughts deny.

Aesop.

I cannot blame thee: but he who would dwell
In courts must be more supple; 'tis the taint
Of kings to hate unpleasing honesty.
Still, would we be no less than just to Croesus,
We must admit his faults are such as grow
As naturally in the royal state
As fungi in a moist and gloomy wood:
But search beneath that forced, unwholesome growth,
You find much good in him. He does not rule
His realm unjustly; he's not merciless,

Made cruel by suspicion; oft he shows
His native kindness and good-fellowship.

Solon,

I have observed it; and report extols
His open-handed generosity.

'Tis known how royally he once repaid
Alcmæon for some kindness that he did
To certain Lydians; and how he laughed
To see him stagger from his treasury
Laden with gold, which in his boots he stuffed,
And in his bulging tunic; all his hair
With gold dust sprinkled, and his mouth crammed
full.

Had Croesus not been Fortune's favourite,
To use the vulgar phrase, he would have been,
I'm sure, a man to honour and esteem:
And if in days to come it please the gods,
As easily it may, to send him griefs,
And bring him to humility and pain,
He will emerge ennobled: could he see
That which is worthiest, he would desire
A rise which wears the semblance of a fall,
Nor with complaints receive the award divine.

Aesop.

It does not well appear how such mishap
Could come upon him ; for he has subdued
All that have met with him ; no foe remains
To challenge him ; the Assyrians and Medes
Hold sway too far aloof to vex his reign.

Solon.

Sesostris proudly trampled all the land
Of Asia, from the Nile to golden Colchis,
Farther from him than Sardis from the Mede.

Enter Croesus.]

Croesus.

Well Solon, dost thou think that any king
Who ever ruled in Egypt or in Greece
Or Babylon possessed a granary
So heaped with precious grain as this of mine ?

Solon.

I well believe, O King, that so much gold
Was never garnered in one place before.

Croesus.

Now Solon, thy acquaintance with the world
Is not of recent date, nor to one land

Or city circumscribed; a host of men
Thou must thyself, or by report, have known:
Tell me; of all who thus within thy view
Have passed, how name you him whose state appears
In all respects most blessed and fortunate.

Solon.

I have indeed known many men, O King,
Of very varied lands, degrees, and fortune;
And of them all, a fellow citizen,
A man of Athens, Tellus, seemed to me
In life and death alike most enviable.

Croesus.

That name you uttered was until this hour
A stranger to my ears: I marvel much
Fame never spoke of one so fortunate:
His birth was noble doubtless, and his wealth
The wonder and the envy of the Greeks.

Solon.

No scion of a lordly stock was he:
Of wealth he had sufficient for his needs;
So much as, with content possessed, invites
Felicity as pure as earth can give.

Croesus.

You jest, Athenian: how could such a man
Be held most fortunate of human kind?

Solon.

No unconsidered words, O King, I speak:
The man's desires were bounded, and his means
Were amply correspondent; he espoused
A wife who brought sweet peace into his home,
And bore him offspring marred by no defect
Of form or understanding; his last years
Were cheered and lightened by the merry pranks
Of children's children rendering love for love:
His most harmonious life a splendid close
Obtained, expiring with a swell
Of martial music in the Doric mode.
It chanced that in a skirmish fiercely fought
Betwixt the men of Athens and Eleusis
Our party had the worst, and with dashed hopes
Gave ground before the hotly pressing foe.
But in the very crisis, when despair
Was gripping the Athenians, o'er the plain
Came swiftly running on with rattling arms
A company of hoplites fresh from Athens:
'Twas Tellus who this welcome succour led,

And, fired by his example and his words,
They smote with so impetuous a charge
The Eleusinian flank, that in dismay
Their shattered files were harried from the field.
But Tellus lived no longer: he had won
A glorious death, and pierced with gashes lay.
His grateful fellow countrymen with pomp
And show of grief interred him where he fell:
Untenanted was Athens on the day
When he was laid to rest: above his bones
A monument records his famous deed;
And by our laws his children reap—

Croesus.

Enough;

Many before this man have nobly died;
Or lived a happy uneventful life;
In this no special favour of the gods
Appears: You do surprise me much,
And show strange judgment in this preference
Of mediocre fortunes to a state
Of wealth and power unrivalled, such as mine.
Say then who second in your judgment stands
In point of fortune.

Solon.

Next, O King, I deem
Two men of Argos, Cleobis and Bito,
Most fortunate in life, and in their death
Blessed beyond the lot of mortal men.
Their course was prosperous; as far removed
From shoals of poverty, and other ills
Which often wreck men's lives, as from the blasts
Of envious malice, or anxiety,
Which ruffle and distract the wealthy great.
To means sufficient and a healthy mind
In both was added, in a like degree,
Surpassing comeliness, and strength of frame
So eminent that each as conqueror
Received the garland at the public games.
Their mother was the priestess at the shrine
Of heaven's high queen, the spouse of awful Zeus;
And at a certain ancient festival
In honour of the goddess, custom old
Requiring her the temple to approach,
Borne in a chariot which two oxen drew;
And, by some negligence or strange mishap,
The oxen in default, her stalwart sons,
Yoking their thews and sinews to the car,
Drew car and priestess to the sacred place,

A toilsome course of hard upon two leagues ;
Whichfeat the multitude beheld amazed,
The young men's piety and wondrous strength
Applauding highly ; while the women's voice
Spoke envying the mother who had born
Such offspring. She, with pride and gladness filled,
And thankfulness at deed so filial
And glorious, erect before the shrine,
With hands and eyes upraised in tearful prayer,
The goddess thus addressed :—Hera divine !
Thou seëst all, and knowest well what deed,
How pious, in thy service, my dear sons,
And to thine honour, have this day performed :
I know not what to crave, for ignorant
Is man of what is worthiest and best ;
But, well assured of thy benign regard
For me, so long thy servant, I implore,
O favourable goddess, if my prayer
Be not displeasing, that thou would'st reward
This lustre shed upon thy name and shrine,
Bestowing on my sons, as seems thee good,
The highest blessing that can come to men.—
Such, Croesus, was the mother's prayer. That night
Cleobis and Bito in the temple slept ;
And when the priestess in the morning came

To learn what blessed boon might be their lot,
She found them dead.

Croesus.

'Tis well : I question not
Those men were fortunate in their degree ;
But what a mean opinion thou must have
Of my prosperity, thus praising more
The lives of men so humble and obscure !

Solon.

Croesus, the life of man is like a thread ;
How beautiful and smooth soe'er it be,
Ere long it may be tangled, all in knots,
Which cannot be, but by the knife, unloosed ;
And no one may foresee what fatal hitch
Shall one day check his freely running line.
How many famous kings with sudden fall
Have stooped from power and pride to wretchedness
Most low and miserable ; or lost their lives
In ignominious wise. From affluence
Have many plunged to depths of poverty.
Call no man happy till thou know'st his end,
And can survey in its complete extent
His winding path of life. The poor man too

By moderate desires is made as rich,
And oft far happier than the heir to wealth ;
This last call fortunate ; but happiness
Is in the sphere of poor and rich alike.

Croesus.

Thy words displease me ; I approve them not ;
Nor see in them much evidence of wisdom :
Who could attaint my power ? or what destroy
My treasury's immeasurable store ?
The gods whom I have honoured and enriched
Will not desert me. It offends me much
To hear thee set my fortune thus beneath
The state of men so mean and undistinguished :
Ungratefully methinks thou dost receive
My hospitality ; I press thee not
To lengthened stay with one thou dost despise.

[*Exit Croesus.*

Aesop.

Now, Solon, well thou seëst how it stands :
We either must avoid the eye of kings,
Or else, approaching them, administer,
As mental food, but comfits and confections.

Solon.

Nay, rather take this maxim for a guide ;
Keep silence if you will, but if you speak,
Let truth and usefulness direct your voice :
Offer to every man the best you have,
Be he or king or slave ; if he despise
The proffered gift, no blame accrues to you,
But loss to him ; your self-respect preserved.
Well, I must shortly hence ; wherefore I'll go
Prepare what's needful for my journeying.

Aesop.

I'll go along with you ; it grieves me greatly
That Croesus was so much offended with you.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A Hall in the Palace of Croesus. Croesus, Aesop, Courtiers, Attendants, &c.

Croesus.

Aesop! my mind is troubled by a dream
Which visited my sleep this night that's past.
Think'st thou those flickering pictures of the night
Of serious import, or delusive shows,
Sent by some mocking monarch of the shades
To play the antic and deceive with lies?

Aesop.

The cause of dreams, O King, is like the night
Which gives them birth; dark, and involved in shades
Of mystery. Some say that near the gate
Of Hades, where, 'mid gloom and murky fogs
The cold Cimmerians dwell, a horrid den
Yawns blackly, and reveals its fearful throat,
Whence falls a noxious and profound abyss:
There reigns the god of sleep; and round him throng
Fantastic shapes, strange images and forms

Of beauty, horror, ugliness, and dread,
Which hover to and fro, and, like the clouds,
Dissolve, appear, or don some new disguise.
Three chieftains near the King attendant stand;
Morpheus, the prince of those who wear the shape
And guise of men, in honour next the King;
Phobetor then, who leads the hideous tribe
Of bestial forms, familiar some to view,
With harpies and chimæras, uncouth shapes,
The monsters that torment the frenzied mind:
Third, Phantasus commands the airy troop
Of counterfeited objects without life,
But restless ever with incongruous change
And frequent motion. These three chieftains lead,
Conjoined or separate, their ghostly bands,
At Somnus' bidding, to the upper air;
And send them forth by companies and files
To storm the unguarded ears of sleeping men.
And sometimes, it is thought, the world of shades
Vomits its phantoms to delude and vex
The slumber-chainèd man. While other dreams
Are born of Hecate, and her obey.
Howe'er this be, I cannot but believe
These nightly visitants mere cheats and mimics.
And yet I am reluctant to deny

That, at rare intervals, some god may send
Advice or warning to the pious man,
By visions seen in sleep; and such belief
Is not unwarranted by ancient tales.
But how to tell the genuine from the false
I have no touchstone.

Croesus.

Ah! I fain would think
This dream of mine a web of fantasy,
Embroidered with such mimes and counterfeits
As thou hast spoken of; and I have tried
To pass it by, as claiming slight regard:
But all in vain: look where I will, I see
The horrid vision that destroyed my rest,
Awaking fear continually renewed
By recollection; and it has a power
So irresistible to draw and fix
My struggling thoughts, that I must think it sent,
To warn me, by some god; for sure no shade
In falsehood clad could so compel the mind.
If it be as I fear, I must devise
Some plan to cope with this foreboded mischief,
More terrible than hostile panoply
Of charging squadrons flashing from their breasts

And pointed spears a blaze of borrowed light:
For dangers visible may be opposed;
But blows which, like the levin from the cloud,
Fall from an ambush unexpectedly,
Are hard to parry: so, being ignorant
What place gives birth or where is hatching now
This threatened evil, blindfold I should grope
And strike at random. Gladly I would know
If thou canst any word of counsel give,
Whence light may spring to guide me. Harken
then

Whilst I describe the vision that I saw.
I seemed to stand upon a mountain side,
And, looking down into a rocky gorge,
I saw a band of men, but indistinct
As through a mist, their features not revealed:
They brandished weapons, as engaged in fight;
And, as I watched, one suddenly sprang forth,
And hurled his javelin at the opposing line,
With fatal aim; ah me! I shudder now
To think what followed; for his face who fell
Grew plain before my eyes, and I beheld
My son: O horrible! 'twas he who lay,
With pallid upturned face and glazing eyes,
Bleeding to death.—Then all was dark,

And I awoke: O that I could forget
That dreadful sight!—What thinkest thou of this?

Aesop.

It is no wonder if thy mind is swayed
And dominated by a dream so tragic:
But since to counsel thou invitest me,
I would advise thou brood not much thereon;
For oft do Morpheus and his myrmidons,
Or spirits sent by some malicious god,
In wanton frolic don familiar guise,
The better to deceive and vex the soul:
And, granting it be true, in what sense true
'Twere hard to tell; for Phoebus mostly speaks
In riddling sentence and ambiguous phrase;
And if this picture of the night be his,
Though it import some danger to thy son,
It may be of a fashion different far
From that in which thou sawest it arrayed.
This further may dissuade from anxious thought
And over-hasty action: voice of fame
And song of poet do indeed relate
Strange instances of warnings sent in dreams;
But never in such case, that I have heard,
Did any man avert the ill foretold,

How cunningly so e'er he laid his plans;
Nay rather, oftentimes the accomplishment
Has been the issue of the very means
Designed to strangle it. As when a man,
In terror lest an earthquake should o'erthrow
His house, and he beneath its walls be crushed,
Runs forth into the street, and there is slain,
Struck lifeless by a fragment from the roof.

Croesus.

There is some reason, I dispute it not,
In what thou urgest: but I cannot rest
In calmness waiting for the blow to fall.
To plan some measures, futile though they be,
And quite at random, is no small relief
To anxious minds. He will not seem a fool
Who holds his towns well garrisoned and stored,
Though it may chance they never be besieged:
And should the worst befall, what keen regret
Would point my grief if haply I could think
That my omission left the gate unbarred!

Aesop.

Such promptings of our nature are most strong,
And not to be successfully opposed.

Since, then, thy anxious love, if not employed,
Must brood and fret, and, feeding on surmise,
Grow feverish, 'twere well to take some steps,
Such as may seem to close the door to mischief,
Yet free from risk of incidental issues
Of dangerous consequence. The swords and spears
And daggers, hanging on the palace walls,
Might be removed into some secret place;
And let thy officers be strictly charged
That no one carry arms within the palace,
Or bring in any, if he love his life:
And if to Prudence we give ear at all,
Surely the Prince should go no more to war,
Nor longer lead the Lydian cavalry,
In fields where he in truth hath won renown,
But where thy boding is most like to find
Its dread fulfilment.

Croesus.

Thou advisest well.

And, lest my son should think that we herein
Make question of his valour or his skill,
And be offended, I will lay the grounds
Of my resolve in policy of state;
My wish to see this kingdom, ere I die,

Secured in due succession of my blood ;
Which to be master of I must require
His hasty marriage. He shall know my will
At once. Ho ! Let Prince Atys be informed
That I would speak with him. Had I more sons
Of strength to sway this sceptre, when my hand
Must lay it down, I should not, like a coward,
Thus tremble at an unsubstantial dream ;
But Ardys, as thou knowest, is from birth
Incapable of speech ; and, more than this,
Perchance because of this, is of so dwarfed
And weak intelligence as could not cope
With cares of government. By Fate's award,
Save that, no gift unwelcome ever came ;
That is as yet the only patch of cloud
Upon the bright cerulean canopy
Of my good fortune : now I trembling peer
Into the future, never feared before.

Enter Atys.]

Aesop.

Receive my salutation, noble Prince !

Atys.

Mine take thou in exchange, most worthy Aesop !
My King and father, I am come to learn

Wherefore thou didst desire my presence here;
Pleased ever if I may in aught please thee.

Croesus.

Atys ! thou hast thy courage well approved,
Thy skill and prudent conduct in the field,
When o'er the hoof-scarred plain thy long-spearèd
knights
Chasèd the scampering Phrygians to their lairs.
Enough is done for honour ; now 'tis time
To think of policy, which must forbid
Needless exposure of a life whose loss
Would snap the chain of Gyges' royal race :
Age creeps upon me ; and I fain would see
My grandsons, joyful pledges that this realm
Shall not fall ripe into some stranger's lap.
Now four and twenty times the rugged brow
Of Taurus has been wreathed in dazzling white,
And four and twenty times hath Spring renewed,
With vivifying touch, the varied tints
And pleasant shades that deck sweet Cayster's vale,
Since first thou lookedst on thy mother's face :
Full time it is thou take to thee a wife,
A duty to thy country that thou owest,
Lest, like a ship that hath her master lost,

She fall an easy prey to some rude rover :
To me thou owest somewhat too ; a debt
Unclaimèd hitherto ; and, if thy love
Repudiate it not, as I scarce think
It will, remove a care which presses me,
Exchanging arms for sweet domestic peace.

Atys.

My father ! it has ever been my joy
To do thee pleasure ; and I will not now
Make a beginning of opposing thee :
At thy desire a wife I will receive.
As touching my renouncement of the feats
And glorious risks of war, I do consent
To intermit them till thy gladdened eyes
Shall lusty issue of my blood behold.
For more than this I think thou would'st not ask :
'Twere shame indeed if I, the son of Croesus,
And grandson of the warlike Alyattes,
Who have so mightily for Lydia wrought,
Neglecting such examples, dulled my name
In luxury and tame uxorious sloth.

Croesus.

This shall content me for the nonce, my son ;
Hereafter we will further speak of this :

Thy speedy marriage claims our present care,
Which nothing need delay ; for I, this hour
Foreseeing, have attentively sought out
A fit alliance ; not with fruitless pains ;
For Sardanis, my trusted counsellor,
To whom for worth and old nobility
None equal is in Lydia, hath a daughter,
Hesione, whose form and excellence
In all the qualities that grace a wife
I oft had heard commended, which report
Tested by me has proved no flattering tale.
I have this matter broached with Sardanis,
And nothing hinders but to-morrow's sun
May witness your betrothal.

Atys.

I have heard
This maiden's praises ; but, if naught oppose,
I would myself see and converse with her :
I would not buy a war-horse on report,
And shall I take a wife more heedlessly,
Who cannot be so easily cast off ?

Croesus.

Thou hast my warranty : is that not good
For horse or wife ? Art nice, and difficult,

In sooth. And custom reckons it immodest,
For maiden to reveal her face unveiled
For man's perusal ere betrothal bonds
Have linked her to him ; yet to Croesus' son
That may be granted which is not allowed
To most ; and since thou dost demand to taste
Ere thou consent to eat, ir shall be so.

Enter an Officer.]

What would'st thou ? Speak !

Officer.

O King ! there stands without
Adrastus, son of Gordius, King of Phrygia,
And prays you will receive him.

Croesus.

Bring him in.

With what attendance ?

Officer.

None: he is alone ;
And looks like one by fear to haste impelled.

[Exit Officer.]

Croesus.

'Tis strange that unattended thus he comes:
And like a fugitive whom terror drives,
Or black remorse by wicked deeds begotten;
For never heard I evil of the man,
But from report and knowledge deemed him upright.

Enter Officer with Adrastus, who kneels before Croesus.]

Croesus.

Arise, Adrastus, and unfold thy mind;
Why com'st thou hither in such meagre wise?

Adrastus.

O King! a wretched fugitive I come,
With blood-stained hands, though not with guilty soul,
To make my expiation to the gods;
And, with the sacred rites their laws ordain,
Purge off the foul defilement they abhor:
Perform, O King, the ceremonies due,
Which may assuage the dire Eumenides,
And break the bond which bars me from the shrines.

Croesus.

O son of Gordius! truly in my heart
Compassion grows for thee whom late I knew

High raised above thy fellows; now, it seems,
Abjectly fallen; weighted with the wrath
Of gods and men, though not with guilt, thou
sayest:

But were thy guilt most flagrant, thy request
For purifying rites thou should'st obtain;
For never should I dare, a mortal man,
To stand between the criminal and heaven.

(To an Attendant)

Go thou, and fetch some water from the spring
Which, with refreshing breath and drowsy song,
Pours forth its sparkling wavelets in the court;
Dissolve some salt therein; and with thee bring
An olive branch; for purifying drops
From olive sprinkled are of wondrous virtue.
Meanwhile, Adrastus, I would gladly hear
What brought thee to this lamentable pass.

Adrastus.

Alas! O King! thou biddest me recall
Things painful to remember; words of wrath,
And violent act; yet may I not refuse
The hard recital which to thee is due.—
There rose a certain rivalry of sport
'Twixt Agathon, my brother, and myself,

Which, pure at first, ere long unwholesome grew,
And turned to bitterness and sharp dispute:
Then passion was enkindled, whose dull flame
Flashed words that scorch and lacerate the soul:
My brother, frenzied by a stinging taunt
Which anger struck from me, unsheathed his sword;
But as it hissing clove the yielding air
I nimbly leapt aside, eluding death:
Then blazed my wrath and all my sense consumed;
On my deaf ears in vain then Zeus had pealed
His loudest thunder; in a dream I saw
A swaying form, and rapid blades confused;
Yet heard no clash, nor felt the weapon's jar.
Then suddenly the cloud which wrapped my sense
Appeared to break, and at my feet I saw
My brother bleeding, in the throes of death.
Ah! vainly weeping then, I cursed my wrath:
How paltry then the plea of self-defence
Appeared! Alas! far better had I stood
And in my undefended breast received
My brother's sword; now should I be at peace.
What followed scarce I know; my father raged,
And drove me forth with curses: thence I came
To thee, O King! that from the stain of blood
I might be cleansed, and cease to offend the gods.

Croesus.

Thy grievous tale, Adrastus, moves me much;
And wakes my pity for the royal house
Of Gordius: I thy father long have known,
And honoured; and full well my heart can read,
And, in the language of its own affections
And fears, interpret his distracted soul.
Thee too I pity that thou know'st thyself
The cause of so much misery and grief:
But brooding o'er the past can naught undo;
New scenes, new friends, and kindly words and
looks,
Although at first they chafe, and irksome seem
To minds which hard affliction chains and galls,
Yet do insensibly benumb the weals
Whose rawness shrank from the physician's touch:
Wherefore, remain thou here; I do not say
A guest; be thou a comrade to my son;
Here find a brother and a second home;
And may the pleasant converse of this court,
Like cheerful sunshine, banish from thy heart
The gloom and mist which now have settled
there;
Waking in thee the buds of calm content
And spring-like growths of new-born happiness.

Adrastus.

O King ! how far thy gracious words transcend
My poor desert ! which meaner doth appear
Neighoured with so great generosity.
Prosperity is always well received ;
But they whom their own fault, or adverse chance,
Has overthrown most commonly are crushed
By every proud wayfarer's trampling feet :
Had'st thou but in compassion turned aside,
Disdaining to insult a fallen man,
I should have thanked thee ; but to raise me up,
Refresh me, salve my bruises, take my hand
With words of comfort such as might befit
A father's lips, O King ! thou fill'st my heart
With feelings that would fain find utterance,
But must in painful impotence be dumb.

Croesus.

Too highly dost thou rate a few kind words ;
And I am not so poor that I must groan
Beneath the load of hospitality.

Enter Servant, with a bowl and an olive branch.]

But see ! here comes the liquid pure and clear
From living fount collected, whose bright drops

Are foes to every foul defiling stain ;
Here too the sacred leaves, whose parent tree
Is dear to gods ; to whom I make my prayer
That they now favour and accept this rite.

Croesus takes the olive branch, dips it into the water, and sprinkles Adrastus three times.

Croesus.

By cleansing water, and by salt the foe
To all corruption, may the taint of blood
Be so expungèd that thou cease to be
Obnoxious to the virgin deities,
The blood-avengers, nor displease the gods.
Now come thou straight and pour from brimming cups
Libations to the stern Eumenides ;
Three golden cups of honey shalt thou empty,
And, after, three of oil ; such sober bowls
The ever watchful virgins most delight :
Thereafter thou wilt dread not to approach
With sacrifice the deities benign.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III.

A Room in the Women's Apartments in the House of Sardanis.
Hesione and Nurse discovered.

Nurse.

Art glad, Hesione ? thou must be glad !
And yet thou dost not laugh ; but in thy face,
Which well I can construe, I read the signs
Of pensiveness ; though from displeasure free :
But joy I sought ; for what in woman's lot
Can be compared with marriage ? 'tis the door
That leads from bondage to a larger life :
And when it hides a stair whose splendid top
Is royalty, what maid would not rejoice
To hear that she must climb it ? Dost not thou ?

Hesione.

I am not sorry, Nurse ; for well I knew
That I must wed ! and, as my duty bids,
My parents' choice is mine ; and few indeed
At such a choice would cavil ; yet some thoughts
Of sober hue win access to my mind.

I am not yet betrothed ; and to receive
And bear the gaze of one whom I as yet
Am stranger to, I should have thought immodest,
But that my father has approvèd it :
And even so I do not like it much :
To know myself examined, scanned, and measured,
As I were merchandise displayed for sale,
Must needs abash me, and imbrue my cheeks
With shame's emblazonry. My veil I'll wear
Till, by the favour of its kindly screen,
I teach myself to bear his hardy looks ;
And 'twill be my advantage to peruse
His face ere he have leave to look on mine.
But how if I displease him ? what a shock
My pride will suffer ! offered and rejected !
O dreadful thought ! expect not gaiety
With contemplation such as this to dwell.

Nurse.

Tut, tut ! fret not thyself ! the prince hath eyes,
And skill to tell a ring-dove from a raven :
Dismiss these fancies, and give room to joy.
What are young women come to ? One would think
A flawed advantage offered ; when in truth
Thou in the contest hast secured the crown.

Not thine the lot, which I have known befall,
To wed some testy and decrepit lord,
Or scoundrel whom the sufferance of Heaven
Has left in life for some ignoble use,
Bartering youth and beauty for high birth
Or necessary gold, a helpless pawn
Of policy ; or with the bait of wealth
To be snapped up by heartless egotist.
Not often is it maiden's hap to find
A bridegroom handsome, brave, and generous,
On whose tried virtue jealousy alone
Her slimy venom all in vain discharges ;
Heir to a throne and boundless wealth to boot :
Were I thy age, owning a face and form
Worth looking on, all day I'd gladly stand
A mark for his fixed gaze, to be his wife.
Commendable is modesty in maids ;
Yet there be times when boldness better serves :
Then thank the gods, and smile upon the Fates
Who such rare splendour in thy web have woven.

Hesione.

Ah ! Nurse ! the promise of to-day is fair ;
Phoebus in glory rides benignant forth ;
But what beyond the darkness lies concealed ?

Thou lov'st me, but my feelings canst not share :
I am content, though gaiety stands aloof.

Nurse.

Well, well, my dear, I can be well content
That thou art so, and will be gay for both.
But yonder shadow in its silent course
Now warns me that the appointed hour is nigh :
Therefore I'll go meet Atys as he comes.

[*Exit Nurse.*]

Hesione.

Now were it well to wish that I could feel
As that good creature might, were my lot hers ?
I think not so, though thus I might attain
More happiness: nay, not more happiness,
But less discomfort; for the blunt of sense
Buy their immunity with keenest joys.
Dreary at best is woman's lot: in youth
Confined at home, a slave to loom and shuttle;
Marriage her only hope of liberty,
Which may be but a lighter servitude,
With many a care encompassed: cold neglect,
Or even harshness may dethrone sweet love.
I've heard that Atys hath a noble nature;
Methinks he should be kind; why should he not?

'Twould be my wish to please him: here within
Is plenteous store of love, which should be his
If he disdain it not. To me 'tis strange,
If it be true, that men, as I have heard,
Grow weary oft to sip the wonted stream,
And seek new fountains: O may gods ordain
I be not thus neglected. Full of doubt
The future lies, from whose dark urn may come
Much happiness, or pain in various forms:
Propitious be the Fates, and grant me bliss!
He comes. Kind veil, be thou my courage now!

(Covers her head with her veil.)

*Enter Atys and Nurse. Nurse remains in the background,
Atys and Hesione stand a little distance apart.*

Atys.

Fairest Hesione! for well I feel
That thou art fair; though, like the jealous cloud
That Phœbe's full-orbed splendour doth obscure,
Thy veil conceals the whiteness of thy brow,
And quenches the bright cressets of thine eyes:
Not seldom, through a peaceful summer night
Walking abroad, I have beheld the moon
With gauzy cloud-wreaths veiled, which, from her
sheen

Tints delicate and misty borrowing,
Have but enhanced the beauty they would hide:
Such sweetly-tempered loveliness methinks
Delights me now; and for a little while
I can endure that screen, that so my sight
May learn to bear unclouded brilliancy.
Too plain in sooth my hardihood appears:
It seemed an easy thing ere here I came
To beg this interview; but now amaze
At my rude trespass checks my utterance.
What shall I say to thee? I will retire,
Unblessed by sight of thy unveiled face,
Rather than wound thy tender modesty:
Dismiss me by a sign and I will go:
And yet I pray thee give me leave to stay!
Here to remain I count a privilege
Not to be bought with gold, or all the realms
That call my father king. And ere I go
I fain would know that thou forgiv'st my boldness
In this invasion: of thy kindness, speak!
And say that thou canst pardon me.

Hesione.

My lord!

Where is no injury, there needs no pardon;

Yet if it please thee that I say I pardon,
I do say so.

Atys.

As pleasant to mine ear
Thy voice, as sweetest song of tuneful birds,
Or sound of lyre well struck by minstrel's hand.
To say my presence gives thee no offence
Is to permit it: therefore I will stay:
And like a watcher for the dawn I'll stand
And pray to see thy face. But hear me first,
While I entreat thee for a precious gift—
Thyself: lest thou should'st feel that, like a slave
Exposed in the mart, thou offerest
Thy features to my critical review,
I ask thee now to promise me thy hand,
Which solemnly I here agree to take.

Hesione.

My lord! it is my honoured parents' will,
Whom it becomes me not to disobey.

Atys.

'Tis well! to wed thee by thy parents' will
Is something; but if thine go not therewith,
Joy blesses not our hymeneal feast:

More bitter than delightful 'twere to take
A cold reluctant hand, or press a kiss
On irresponsive lips. I do not wish
A soulless body in my arms to clasp;
If then thy will thy parents' seconds not,
O let me know it, and I thee will woo,
Until I lure thy soul to cling to mine,
Powerless to wander: at thy door I'll hang
Fresh garlands daily, turning thy abode
To Eros' Temple; where, a worshipper,
I'll pour libations at thy honoured shrine:
With incantations, and with love-knots true
I'll bind thy love; and charm thine ear with hymns
Most passionate, with note of well-strung lyre
And Lydian melody from pipe and flute.
Not like rough Peleus would I snatch my bride,
But see her, dove-like, timidly approach.
I pray thee tell me; can thy love unforced
Respond to mine? Hesione! I wait
Thy answer: speak!

Hesione.

My lord! until this hour
I never heard your voice, nor saw your face:
Love comes not to maturity so fast:

Some say indeed that he at times doth spring
Full-grown to birth, and has no infancy ;
Howbeit to me that seems not credible.
And thou my face hast not yet seen at all ;
Perchance at sight of it thy new-born love,
If it be born indeed, will frightened die :
Thou scarce canst love me whom thou knowest not.

Atys.

Well I believe, Hesione, that Love
May in an hour put forth Titanic strength ;
For is he not a god ? Nor is it true
That thee I know not, for all-seeing Fame
Has drawn thy portrait, which thy voice and air
Confirming have my love to vigour fed.
Canst thou not love me, fair Hesione ?

Hesione.

My lord ! obedient to my parents' will,
I give myself to thee : yet not as forced,
Reluctant to a hateful doom, I come ;
Nor does my will against their will rebel.

Atys.

Sweetest Hesione ! I am content ;
My love shall teach thy budding love to grow.

And since thou dost consent to be my wife,
Thou may'st unveil without disparagement
Of modesty.

(*Hesione removes her veil.*)

Atys.

Now o'er the distant hills
I seem to see Aurora stepping forth,
With blushes all suffused, and radiant brow,
Encircling mists with rosy beams dispelling.
Here could I gaze unsated all the day.
Unsated ! Nay, mine eyes thus pasturing
Would sharpen appetite still more and more.
So vainly longing I'll forbear to stand,
But rather go to hasten the betrothal ;
My father's willingness needs not the spur,
Who covets thee already for a daughter.
I go then now, that I may soon return.
Farewell, Hesione ! about thee play
Graces and Nymphs ! and pleasant be thy thoughts !
And may I be to darkness ever doomed,
In deepest Erebus, if aught of grief
Through me e'er stain and furrow thy fair cheeks !

Hesione.

Thee, too, may Heaven with favourable eye
Regard !

Atys.

I thank thee. Once more, fare thee well!

[*Exit Atys, followed by Nurse.*

Hesione.

As when a sunbeam from the western sky
Down through the window leaping, lights his lamp
And gleams upon the wall, but, as the sun
Rolls down the sky and summons back his child,
Reluctantly it goes, how dull then seems
The place it brightened ; so now looks this room
Dreary and dark as ne'er it looked before.
And yet a strange new happiness invades
My throbbing breast ; but with it enters too
A vague and formless fear : oft have I heard
That when the flowing tide of happiness
Comes to the full, it then begins to ebb :
Kind Heaven, I do not ask excess of bliss ;
Exalt me not whence I must fall again,
Nor send me joys whose aftermath is pain.

[*Exit.*

SCENE IV.

Hall in the Palace of Croesus. Enter Croesus and Sardanis.

Croesus.

I now have opened to thee, Sardanis,
The reasons which so urged me to desire
My son's immediate marriage, and the fear
Whose spectral admonitions I obeying
By soft enmeshments of connubial joy
Design to keep him near my watchful eye.

Sardanis.

O King ! I understand thy anxious care ;
And for a while no doubt thy nets will hold :
Strong are Love's fetters when they're newly forged ;
But iron better bears the brunt of Time :
And 'tis not likely that a mettled youth
Who once has quaffed intoxicating war
Will long lie tamely in a woman's lap.
But let the future for its own provide ;
The day is not too long to deal aright
With what the day brings forth : a matter now

Craves thy attention. Lately hither came,
Requesting audience, messengers from Mysia ;
But thou being then immersèd in the flood
Of nuptial ceremonies and rejoicings,
I bade them wait on thy convenience.
Is it thy pleasure to receive them now ?

Croesus.

Yes, let them enter !

Sardanis (to an officer).

By the King's command,
Admit the Mysians, who await without !

Enter Mysians, who kneel before Croesus.]

First Mysian.

Hail ! mighty Croesus ! lord of many lands !

Croesus.

Arise, my friends ! and say what news ye bring
From Mysia. Did some trouble wing your feet
To bear you hitherward ? Or is all well ?

First Mysian.

O King ! to thee as to a father looking
Benign and powerful, in our distress

We come, confiding in thy ready help.
The case is thus: among the rugged slopes
Of high Olympus now for many moons
A boar of monstrous size hath kept its lair,
Whence making frequent sallies on our herds
And crops, it hath dire devastation wrought:
A brute of such ferocity and strength
Has never plagued mankind since that which lurked
In Erymanthus, or that through the heights
Of Calydon was hunted. Vain the skill
And force of our best hunters, who have dared
In horrid duel to confront him; all
Have by his murderous tusks been slain or mangled.
No longer venture any to oppose
His ravenous rage, as o'er our fields he roves,
Devouring and destroying. Now, O King,
To thee as to a father we appeal:
Our countrymen have sent us to thy feet,
To pray thee that thou wouldest send thy son
With men and dogs to extirpate this pest
Which thus oppresses us.

Croesus.

'Tis not in vain,
O men of Mysia! that you here appeal

To my compassion. I will send forthwith
The boldest hunters that in Lydia dwell,
And dogs of such a breed that ye might search
All Asia for their like: a valued gift
From Sparta's king they came. But for my son,
Dismiss him from your thoughts ! he cannot go ;
For he a wife has taken, and his vows
To Hymen are no more than two days old.
Go, Sardanis! and set at once in train
This expedition. [*Exit Sardanis.*]

And do ye return,
And to your country be the harbingers
Of better days, and freedom from this scourge.

First Mysian.

Most gracious King and father of thy people!
The gods upon thee shower unnumbered blessings!

[*Exeunt Mysians.*]

Croesus.

My plan has in its building and its launch
Gone smoothly: Atys now is in my trap;
And with his gentle bride seems well content:
O may she, like a tendril lithe and tough,
Twine round his heart and bind him to his home.

But hard is youthful courage to confine
Or tame; and therefore dread still haunts my mind.

Enter Atys, followed by Adrastus.]

Atys.

My father! I am told that, on the ground
Of marriage newly joined, thou hast refused
For me the conduct of the hunting foray
Which at the Mysians' suit has been decreed:
But if nought else but that withstands my going,
I pray thee let me go: to face a boar
Which demigods might not disdain to hunt
I well can bear a few days' severance
From home and wife: sweet is connubial love;
But on sweetmeats alone what man can live?

Croesus.

My son! the reason that I showed the men
Was but a cloak; of full validity
Is that which forced me to oppose thy going.
Be satisfied; I've business for thee here.

Atys.

In ancient times, as I full oft have heard,
No business or pursuit was worthier deemed,

And more becoming men of royal birth,
Than war and hunting. All my ancestors
Have been renowned for skill in both of these ;
And must I be alone for future times
A shade, a name, no more, by no exploit
Distinguishèd above the common crowd ?
And what a low opinion of my valour
Must be engendered in the mind of her
Whom I have wedded, when she sees me sit
Thus woman-like in guarded ease at home !
You wrong me, father, like a tender child
To coop me thus ; as though I were too soft
To deal with danger or hardship endure.
I pray thee let me go : or marshal forth
Such reasons as must conquer my desire !

Croesus.

Atys ! thy life to me and to this state
Is dear beyond the sum of all my wealth :
Ten thousand of her bravest warriors
Could Lydia better spare than thee alone :
Reason enough is here why I should guard
That life with care more fearful than my own.
But yet this is not all ; and thou shalt hear
What further doth imperiously command

My present wariness; that thou may'st know
My mind no slave to vague unreasoning fear
Or doting father's love. As late in sleep
My body lay enthralled, my conscious mind
A terrifying vision entertained;
But whence I know not. Thee, my son, I saw
In battle's fierce contention, as it seemed,
By hostile weapon pierced, and dying fall.
Now if this dream were sent me by some god
To warn me, it were impiously done,
And most ungratefully, to toss aside
The warning, as in scorn and disbelief.
I cannot choose but block each avenue
Which danger may to thy dear life admit.

Atys.

Far be it from my thoughts to throw contempt
On things divine; or view with scornful eyes
Heaven's premonitions: if 'twere now proposed
To levy war on men, whose steel-tipped spears
Might threaten life, I would not enter plea
Against thy judgment: but with no tall spear
Nor javelin brandishèd the boar attacks;
Therefore the application of thy dream

Fits not this hunting; since 'twas by the thrust
Of human hand the vision showed me stricken.

Croesus.

The vision truly seemed to bode thy fall
In fight with men and by a human arm:
But who can tell if some marauding band
May not attack you; or a rebel force
Of Mysians discontented with our sway,
Which, newly laid upon them, haply galls?

Atys.

It seems to me, my father,—with respect
I speak it—that small is the likelihood
Of such encounter: for thy hand and eye,
In every part of this extended realm
Efficient through thy zealous officers,
Have traced and broken every brigand's hive.
If still some scattered remnants roam at large,
They rather will retire into their dens,
Than seek an enterprise where blows and thrusts
Await them, with slight promise of reward.
And though the Mysians be not reconciled
To our new yoke, will they attack us now
Going to rid them of a plague, a sore
Which smarts and festers so as our control

I'm sure does not ? O, I shall be as safe—
The very indication of thy dream
Confirms it—going thither as at home ;
For from no place can Death be barrèd out.
Send, if it please thee, of the bravest men
That guard thy throne, a troop so panoplied
That none shall dare attack ; and I engage,—
A promise hard to make, harder to keep,
Yet for the love I bear thee I will make
And keep it too—should any be so bold
To challenge us, I, with a chosen guard,
Avoiding danger, will retire ; the rest
For the aggressors shall employment find,
Which will not leave them leisure to pursue.
Wherefore, O father, from thy mind expel
Unfounded fears, and give me leave to go !

Croesus.

My son ! I am convinced : thy reasoning
Hath chased away opposing doubts and fears.
Go then, and needful preparation make
For thy departure.

Atys.

O receive my thanks !

[*Exit Atys.*

Croesus.

Adrastus ! I desire some speech with thee,
Remain awhile !

Thou, in thy book of memory, methinks,
Hast entered me thy creditor : no need
Is there that I should reckon up the sum ;
Or fear lest thou repudiate the debt ;
For thou art rather apt to overvalue
A service which to render no expense
Of trouble or annoyance laid on me.

And now hath Time the ripe occasion brought
Which I have heard thee pray for, and the means
To strike the balance even. Thou hast heard
How I have yielded to my son's desire
To hunt this boar, in spite of anxious fear :
Thus may'st thou serve me ; with my son depart ;
And separate not from him ; where he goes,
Go thou ; and be alert ; with watchful mind
Foresee and fend off every threatened harm ;
And bring him to my sight again unscathed.

Adrastus.

Croesus ! I owe thee all ; my life is thine,
A loan, and to thy service consecrate :
I did not think it fitting to compete

In honourable rivalry with men
Whose hands are pure from homicidal stain ;
Nor like a shameless roisterer to flaunt
My tarnished title in the public glare ;
And therefore had I purposed to abide
In such retirement as thou would'st permit,
And modesty enjoined. But thy command
Is paramount ; and every wish must yield
To gratitude. In me shall Atys find
Another pair of eyes and ready hands ;
A shield not for a moment laid aside ;
Nay more, a second life ; for e'er the blow
That threatens him his body's citadel
Can once assault, I first, his outer wall,
Must be thrown down ; be sure he shall not fall,
Nor come to harm while I remain alive :
Henceforth he owns two lives ; and of the twain
He first must lose the one that lives in me.

Croesus.

For this devotion, friend, I thank thee much,
And will with love requite it. Come with me,
That we may further speak upon this matter.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V.

The Same. Enter Croesus, Bias, Sardanis, Aesop, and Attendants.

Croesus.

Bias ! it hath been ever my delight
To honour wisdom and exalted virtue :
Of much which I could boast not this the least
I reckon, that this place is the resort
Of those whose names shine first among the Greeks
For probity and wisdom. Not the dullest
Art thou among the pole-encircling stars
Of intellect : thou didst my father teach
That one transcendant mind can more avail
To hold at bay the foes that throng around
A city's walls than all the stalwart guards
That keep it, armour-clad and skilled in fight.
Me, too, thou keptst long waiting at the gates
Of proud Priene : but I can admire
Worth in a foe ; nor have I cause to hate,
Since on my enterprise the favouring gods

Did smile, and placed thy city in my hands :
Thou hadst the worst ; but since magnanimous
Thou comest as a guest, nor bearest grudge,
I give thee hearty welcome ; and no boon
That thou canst ask shall seem to pass due bounds.

Bias.

O King ! I thank thee for thy friendly speech,
And kindly offer ; but I nothing lack :
I once was rich ; no longer am I so ;
But loss of wealth to me no evil seems :
Him deem I wretched who knows not to bear
Misfortune patiently. Bless thou the gods
Who have so prospered thee ; and ever seek
To know and do their will.

Croesus.

Thus have I done ;
And still have been the favourite of heaven :
All Asia west of Halys calls me king ;
Of all the Grecian cities that o'erlook
The western sea, not one disputes my power :
'Tis now my purpose presently to build
A fleet of triremes which upon the isles
Shall swoop like eagles ; that those foam-set gems

May be an added glory to my crown.
Thou hast been lately there a visitor :
Tell me how fare the islanders ; what strength
Of vessels have they to defend their rocks ?

Bias.

Secure, O King ! behind their watery walls,
Which better far than stone or earth hold off
The covetous aggressor, they prepare
Squadrons of cavalry, which, ferried o'er
The moaning deep, may meet thy Lydian horse
In battle shock upon the steadfast main.

Croesus.

Thanks to that god which hath inspired their minds
With so great madness, that unforced they leave
Their wonted element to dare my power
In conflict strange wherein I most excel :
How I rejoice in this intelligence !

Bias.

And dost thou not consider then, O King !
That they will no less gladly hear the news
Of thy design to meet them on the waves,
Where use and wont will on their side contend,

Their force redoubling, so that they may hope
To deal thee such a blow as shall relax
Thy grip upon the cities of the coast ?

Croesus.

Ah ! say'st thou so ? I had not thought of that :
And yet maybe there's wisdom in thy words :
I will at least further reflect on this
Ere I embark in it. Well, Sardanis !
Should we not soon have tidings of my son ?
Methinks there has been fully time enough
For men to go to Mysia and return.

Sardanis.

In truth, O King, without excessive haste
They might be seen this very day in Sardis :
For were a spear propelled with might enough
To send it speeding hence to pierce the side
Of old Olympus, hissing through the air
It would a thousand stadia measure out ;
A three days journey for a mounted man
Considerate of his horse : seven times the sun
Hath scorched the crags of Tmolus with his fires
Since Atys hence departed, wending north.

Croesus.

'Tis well : I long to see him back again :
 For I cannot an inward whisper quell
 That speaks ill-omened words, and wakens thoughts
 Which I would banish from my anxious mind.

Enter a Messenger, who kneels before Croesus.]

Messenger.

Wide-ruling king ! grant pardon to thy slave !

Croesus.

What crime hast thou committed ? Hast thou slain
 By inadvertence, or by rage impelled ?
 Speak ! thou shalt find me not unmerciful
 So justice be not shaken from her throne.

Messenger.

No man, great King, by me hath suffered harm :
 But I am sent to wound thy happiness
 With so keen-edgèd words that, Death except,
 No surgeon hath the skill to make it sound.
 Thy son, O King ! alas ! how shall I say it ?

Croesus.

My son ? what hath befallen ? Ah ! my dream !
 Speak man ! thy words have brought a sudden fear
 Like night upon me.

Messenger.

Would I could dispel it !

A grievous accident, most gracious King !
Hath lopped away from thee thy fairest bough :
Prince Atys lives no more.

Croesus.

It cannot be !

Dead ? dead ? My son, Prince Atys dead ?

Messenger.

Alack !

Croesus.

Gone, gone for ever is the salt of life !
O gods ! O Phoebus ! do ye thus reward
One who with steadfast and with pious heart
Has paid you honour, glorified your name,
Enriched your shrines and temples ? Is it true
That gods are jealous of too happy men ?
What profits it their nostrils to invade
With steaming savour from the gushing veins
Of bulls and sheep, by hundreds sacrificed ?
With golden cisterns, bowls, and images
In large profusion to endow their dwellings,
If, greedily exacting, they begrudge

Such happiness as in this broken stream
Of mortal life may spring from pure affection?
O Atys! all my pride, and all the hope
Of Lydia, and the sceptred race of Gyges!
I have no heart to hear, and yet would know
How fate o'ertook thee. Stand thou, and relate
How chanced this evil!

Messenger.

At the first, O King!

Our journey prospered: time-beguiling mirth
And gay anticipation winged our way,
And carried us, not far behind our hope,
To Mysia and the slopes of high Olympus.
Nor wandered long at fault the eager hounds;
But swiftly, baying open-mouthed, led on,
Until, with clamour hoarse and vehement,
A narrow cavern fiercely they besieged,
Ensconced within a gorge whose rocky sides
Re-echoed to the din. Soon then were spread
The nets; and from his lair the monstrous boar
Was driven foaming; horrid in his rage:
And soon his gleaming tusks were stained with gore
That from the dogs' ripped flanks and bellies streamed.
But with constricted circle round him close

The fearless huntsmen; and with levelled spears
Await his charge. A moment he surveyed
With angry eyes the hemming ring of iron;
And then, as though disdaining meaner blood
Than that which flows in royal veins, he rushed
Swiftly, with sullen snarl, and low-bent head,
Straight on the Prince; and with prodigious force
Wrenched from his firmly gripping hand the spear:
He straightway threw himself along the earth,
And thus the monster's upward-glancing tusk
Barely escaped. The Phrygian stranger then,
Adrastus, fearing for the Prince's life,
Ran up, and with his spear attacked the beast;
But in his eagerness o'ershot the mark,
And pierced the body of thy noble son.
Another javelin, aimed with greater heed,
Transfixed the monster; but the Prince, thy son,
Alas! O King! lay dead upon the sward.

Croesus.

Thou may'st retire.

[*Exit Messenger.*

O why was I so weak
And easy to subject my riper judgment
To boyish ardour and headstrong desire

That outruns reason ? What avails the fruit
Experience bears, if wisdom tamely bow
In homage to impatient ignorance ?
Nor did the wisdom well attest its claim
To govern, which entrusted so great wealth
Of happiness to one whom wrath divine
Already had so plainly linked with grief.
I by that weak surrender am the cause :
I am the slayer of my own delight.
O sun ! in vain for me henceforth thou shinest :
How dark and joyless now will time crawl on ;
Day ranked with day in dull monotony !

Aesop.

O Croesus ! ancient rhapsodists aver
That Zeus himself, the cloud-compelling king,
Hath not the power to ravel out the thread
That Clotho spins, or stay the fatal shears :
The vision which forewarned thee of this day
Thereby declared this mischief fore-ordained,
Hence unavoidable ; else were the god
Who sent it thee with falsehood chargeable :
Accuse not then thyself ; thou didst not cause
What even thy great might could not prevent.

Croesus.

Of what advantage is it then to know
Ills threatened, if we cannot counterwork them ?
Apollo ! little cause had I to thank
Thee for this warning ; for thus twice descends
The stroke, and with anticipated grief
The intervening time is slowly racked.
But what avails complaint against the gods ?
For them can neither mortal railings vex,
Nor arm disturb upon their blissful seats ;
But he whose hand accomplishèd this woe,
And planted in the heart of my dear son
A pang which propagates itself in mine,
Not thence in life to be eradicated,
He hath a sensitive and mortal frame,
Which can be brought to torture, stripes, and death :
Could I behold him writhing, hear him groan,
Who hath so evilly requited me,
A bitter joy would temper my despair.
Thou Zeus ! whose care unsleeping guardeth round
The stranger guest, and guest-receiving host,
Protecting hospitality's due rites,
I summon thee to witness and reward
My benefactions to this bloodstained man !
He hither, like Orestes, fury-driven,

A wretched exile, bowed beneath a curse,
Came wandering ; his burden I removed ;
The blood that stained his fratricidal hand
I cleansed away with rites thereto ordained ;
And made him welcome with the best I had :
How should I know that Fate's directing hand
Had aimed him hither as a weapon barbed,
To which I bared my unsuspecting breast ?
O Zeus ! if charity be thus repaid,
Who will in future dare to entertain
And soothe and cheer a wretched fugitive ?
So will thy office come to disrepute ;
And thou, the guardian of those kindly rites,
For negligent connivance be despised.
Then grant me that which now alone thou canst,
To lay my hand upon this murderer,
And, gazing on his torment, dull my own.
Go, Sardanis ! take men, seek out and hale
Adrastus hither : come not back again
Till thou with him canst feed my hungry sight ;
And see thou harm him not ; for he must live,
That I may pour my heapèd grief upon him :
I burn within ; he therefore too shall burn,
Slow fire shall scorch and blister all his flesh.
Delay not ! Go ! and may'st thou soon return !

Sardanis.

I'll find him, though he traverse half the world,
Through Scythian wastes, or Libya's deserts wide.
O King ! behold ! here comes the man himself !

Enter Adrastus, who throws himself at the feet of Croesus.]

Adrastus.

O, Croesus, slay me ! Lo ! I bow my neck
Before thee ! let thy just resentment slake
Its thirst for vengeance in my fatal blood !
I am accursèd : surely at my birth
Some god did lay a ban upon my head,
That by my hand, against my will, do flow
Death and disaster to my dearest friends.
Never did life to any seem so sweet
As death to me : then grant me death, O King !
Naught more acceptable canst thou bestow.

Croesus.

Adrastus ! ill for good hast thou repaid ;
And loudly did my griefs importune me
To sink with ample weight the swinging scale ;
And, with a double dose of drawn-out anguish,

Cancel the good thou tookest, and repay
The evil lately at thy hand received.
Of all the black mishaps that from the urn
Of Destiny could come, this is the worst ;
No evil like to this could wring my heart ;
And, as the wounded lion grips the spear,
And vents his torture on the splintered wood,
So did my anguish vehemently crave
Relief and outlet in the death of thee,
Of thee who art the javelin to my wound.
But man is not a beast ; and after all,
Thou'rt nothing but the unforeseeing dart
By Fate directed, or unerring hand
Of some immortal god, hurtful yet blind :
And when I see thee here prostrate thyself,
And cry in wretchedness of heart for death,
I needs must pity thee ; nor can I hold
My hatred for the unintending tool,
The butt of Destiny no less than I.
I was forewarned of this ; now he who sent
The warning has accomplished the fact ;
And would have used another if not thee.
I then forgive thee : live ! depart in peace ;
And speedily depart ! henceforth with pain
Unbearable thy face must I behold.

Adrastus.

O King magnanimous ! though men hug life,
A boon to be received with thanks and joy,
I ask it not ; nor can I thank thee for it.
Yet for thy favourable words to such
A wretch as I, and clemency displayed,
I thank thee ; though they pierce me with a thrust
More sharp than that wherewith I slew thy son :
I was before abhorrent to myself ;
But now my load is more than I can bear.

Croesus.

Arise, and go thy way ! Let me not see
Thy features more ! and would that I might blot
Thy very name from off my memory !
Go ! Cursèd was the day whereon thou camest !

[*Exit Adrastus.*]

Come hither, Sardanis ! Go thou with speed,
Choose such attendance as the case demands,
So sorted, so apparelled, to escort
Yon train returning with its load of woe ;
That solemn pomp and honourable state
May not be wanting when the son of Croesus
Makes his last entry to the capital.

Sardanis.

O King ! all this shall fittingly be done.

[*Exit.*]

Croesus.

Bias ! thou art reputed wise ; for me
Uncoffer now the treasures of thy mind :
Resolve me this ; for I am much perplexed :
I never have, as rulers often do,
Oppressed the people, nor with scornful joy
Beheld men shrink in terror from my gaze :
'Twas not in me to be in love with Fear ;
Nor wished I such a grim, dark minister :
I dare avouch there lives no man on earth,
Nor shade of those that people Pluto's realm,
Who would come forth and say, thou didst me
wrong !

I know that Nemesis doth set a term
To course too swift and arrogantly run ;
Mine has been smooth and prosperous till now ;
Yet Fortune never wafted me on wings
Of overweening pride : I have enriched,
No niggard of my wealth, both gods and men ;
Why am I now condemned to this rough pain ?
Have gods no power to shield the pious man ?

Bias.

O King ! no wisdom ever reached so high,
That men thereon might scale the Court of Zeus,
And question his decree. Thou hast proposed
A problem wider than the wit of man :
Send to Dodona, or the Delphian shrine ;
I am not of the council of the gods.

Croesus.

Yet Wisdom, delving in the buried past,
And with discrimination sifting facts,
May surely trace the thread and trend of fate :
Can'st thou not thus discover aught of worth ?

Bias.

Old History indeed, questioned aright,
And ancient answers of the Oracles
May furnish hints to Wisdom. Hearken then,
O King ! let History her lore unfold.
A King of Egypt, Mycerinus, son
To Cheops, mighty builder of a tomb,
Excelled in justice all his ancestors,
And who before had swayed Nile-watered Egypt :
Expecting then felicity, and length
Of honoured days, he from the gods received

This heavy recompense, loss of his child,
His only child, a maiden, whom he loved
It may be overmuch ; in that unwise.
Astonied at the blow, he wished to learn
What further slings of Fortune might assail ;
So sent to Butos to the oracle ;
Which answer thus returned : Thy tale of years
Must sum its total at the third from now.
Whereon he sent once more with this complaint,
My father and my uncle ground the folk
And crushed them dry, uprearing of their wealth
Huge monuments, to keep alive their names,
And house their mummies ; hated both of men.
A hundred years they drained the groaning realm,
And mulcted of their dues the nation's gods :
I, like the loamy, fertilizing Nile,
Refreshed the land, and peace and justice gave,
Yet in three years I am condemned to die ;
Not such as this the justice I dispense.
Now, Croesus, mark the answer of the god :
By Fate's inexorable high decree,
Egypt thrice fifty years must be oppressed ;
This not unknown to Chephren and to Cheops,
They made themselves the ministers of Fate,
Which favoured and preserved them for that end :

But thee, who still dost sedulously thwart
Her fixèd will, and bless where thou should'st curse,
She dashes, an obstruction, from her path.

Croesus.

No doubtful lesson, nor ambiguous
This oracle, O Bias, seems to yield ;
And yet with darksome and perplexing doubts
It chills the heart. I ever thought the just
Were pleasing to the gods ; but now I learn
That wickedness may win the chief award,
And justice bring for dowry early death.

Bias.

Nathless, O Croesus, I will close my mind
To any thought that honours not the gods ;
Nor in necessity do such proceed
From what I have related. I discern
Two doorways that from such dark dungeon lead.
The main events of life, it seems, for men
And nations are determined by the fates,
Which gods may modify but not annul ;
This tendency impressed on things by Fate
May be for ultimate and general good,
Yet cannot, but by partial suffering

And incidental sorrow, be secured.
The second point is this: I am not sure
That life is chief of goods, and death much worse ;
Life is a vessel worthless in itself,
And good or bad as it is full or void,
Heaped up with jewels or with rubbish laden.
And ever have I held prosperity
An obol in the scale with wisdom weighed :
Who boards with wisdom never lacks a friend
To comfort and console ; and heaps up wealth
Which nothing can diminish or impair.

Croesus.

Vain words ! mere breath ! none ever made of such
A salve for bruises of the heart or limb.
I see no profitable growth to men
From my affliction, nor, could such accrue,
Would that assuage the grief which now I feel.
Talk not of wisdom ! can I hear it speak
And call me father ; feel its kind embrace !
Enjoy its loving smile, converse with it,
Naming it Atys ? Can it raise me up
Successors of my blood to rule this kingdom ?
O mockery ! Hast thou e'er lost a son ?
And O ! the biting edge of parents' pain

Is sharpened when it is forbidden them
To close their children's eyes ; hear their last words ;
And catch the subtle breath as from its home
It takes its final flight.

Sounds of lamentation without.

Ah ! woful sound !

Which ushers in a still more woful sight.

*Enter men carrying a bier, on which is the body of Atys,
accompanied by soldiers ; the bier is set down in the
middle of the stage. At a sign from Croesus, exeunt
soldiers and bearers.*

Croesus.

Friends ! pray you leave me here alone awhile,
To nurse my grief, and draw sweet agony
From poring o'er the face of my dear dead.

[Exeunt all except Croesus.

Croesus.

Atys ! my son ! my son ! how weak are words,
Which cannot bring thy spirit back to earth !
My mind is numb and bruised as with a blow,
And can but cry, My son, my son is dead !
Why should'st thou die, and I be left alone,
Possessed of wealth and empire, once a pride,

Now hateful since it cannot ransom thee ?
Strangers must reap where I with care have sown ;
For, like a stream drunk up by thirsty sand,
Here ends the river that from Gyges flowed,
In one dead son, and one but half a man :
It sprang in blood, and finds a bloody end..
Alas ! alas ! what can I do ? what say ?
Shall I reproach the gods and rail on Fate ?
But if I curse until I crack my throat,
Wilt thou the less lie there ? O Atys, Atys !
Or shall I weep and wail, and rend my clothes,
And pass the remnant of my wretched life
With tears and groans invoking thy dear name ?
I could do so, and thus the bosom's load
Is lightened ; but soon comes the mocking thought—
No rain of tears will make the dead to bloom—
And lacerates afresh the bleeding heart.
How blind is mortal man ! who neither knoweth
When he should groan, nor when he should be glad.
Alas ! reality may yet be worse
Than worst anticipation ! When I thought
That thou should'st fall in battle, I recoiled
In horror from the picture : blind, O blind !
For now I could rejoice to have it so.
A glorious death ! should that not be preferred

To an ignoble life? Such was the choice
Of Thetis' son: unworthy were my fears
And schemes to guard my son from such a fate!
Then would he in the Elysian fields have mixed
With heroes, honoured, and their bliss have shared:
Now, fallen by unhonourable blow,
He wins no meed of praise among the dead,
But wanders in obscurity alone.

O, Heaven and Earth! if I think much on this
I shall be mad! Yet how can I not think?
Great Mother of the gods! if breasts divine
To soft maternal sympathy are tuned,
In pity hear a father's deep-drawn groans;
And with Nepenthe, or some drowsy herb
That gods employ, so medicine my mind,
That grief may sleep, in deep oblivion drowned.
How peaceful dost thou lie! how still, and calm!
O would that such a peace enwrappèd me!
And yet perchance thy shade—O dreadful thought!—
Roaming uneasily the shores of Styx,
May even now be sorrowing as I.
And soon before the awful tribunal
Of Hades must thou stand; though there no fault
Save such as aye consort with heady youth
Can thee accuse, I will placate and soothe

The dreadful judges and the infernal king
With vows and victims such as they desire :
A hundred sheep unspecked by spot of white
Shall be provided for the sacrifice :
What else may dignify the obsequies
Of Lydia's frustrate hope shall be prepared, —
The oil, the garland, and the snowy shroud ;
And Phrygian flutes shall pour such plaintive dirge
As e'en the fickle air to move to sighs
And moanings moistened with soft-weeping dews.
This melancholy service is the sole
My love can render now. Ah me ! Ah me !
A dreary, dreary road far stretched I see.

[*Exit Croesus.*]

Enter Hesione, accompanied by maidens, beating their cheeks and breasts, and uttering lamentations.]

Maidens.

Woe ! woe ! woe ! woe !
We come to drop the ready tear,
And wail around the mournful bier
Where Lydia's royal stem lies low.

Hesione.

Ah ! wretched me ! unhappy bride !
Too short a while—ah ! well-a-way !—

Wert thou belovèd by my side.
Too soon has night devoured my day,
For I shall never hear
Again thy accents dear ;
Ne'er feel the sweet caress,
When heart to heart doth press ;
Farewell to loving glance and laughter gay !

Maidens.

Woe ! woe ! woe ! woe !
For royal Atys lying low.

Hesione.

Look black, ye clouds, and frown !
Weep, weep your raindrops down !
O sun, in sorrow veil thy pitying eye !
For here my Atys lies,
Deaf to my words and sighs.
My love ! my sweet ! Alas ! he hears no cry.

Maidens.

Alas ! alas ! weep clouds ! and breezes sigh !

Hesione.

No longer earth seems fair,
But desert, bleak and bare,

For Atys was my mountain, stream, and wood ;
All lovely did appear,
When he, my love, stood near ;
Now beauty is eclipsed and naught is good !

Maidens.

Woe ! woe ! woe ! woe !

Hesione.

Come forth, old Boreas, rudely blow !
And challenge Eurus to contend !
Now, Aeolus, thy vassals send
To join with them in awful battle loud !
Hurling athwart the sky the missile cloud ;
Until the raging seas arise,
And furiously storm the skies ;
Howl o'er the mountain tops, and strew
Afar the shattered trees ;
Let lightning burst the welkin through
Confusion earth and sky and ocean seize :
Let Nature groan with dreadful din,
To match the agony within ;
For lo ! my love is lying dead,
And peace is from my bosom fled.

Strange is the ordinance of Fate,
A dark enigma to the mind,
Which dooms me to deplore my mate,
Alone, with useless weeping blind :
To lighten every other ill
That did Pandora's casket fill,
And swarmed on men when she the lid did lift,
Consoling Hope, a precious gift,
Remained, much sorrow countervailing,
Else ne'er were truce to groans and wailing ;
But Hope can never lighten with relief
My long and dreary years of widowed grief :
Stern Death alone, who killed my joy,
My days of mourning can destroy.

How wretched, how unspeakably forlorn
Is her condition, who in life's bright morn,
While yet the blood maintains its course
With all its young torrential force ;
While Venus yet the supple cheek
With her ethereal dye imbues ;
While eyes do yet a language speak
More eloquent than tongue can use ;
Is left to wither day by day
In lonely widowhood unblessed ;

Her cheerless breast
Unvisited by frolic-waking guest,
In sadness wearing uselessly away.

Upon a mountain moorland bleak,
Gloomy and wild and brown and bare,
Where heaven's blasts their will do wreak,
And keen and cruel is the air,
A solitary tree I've seen,
Gnarled, stunted, hungry, stretching wide
Beseeching arms grotesque and lean,
Whose nakedness but pitifully hide
Some paltry quivering shreds of brown and green :
So friendless, cheerless, and alone,
To winds uncouth and cruel frosts exposed,
Is she whose life in youth is closed,
And must her widowed lot from day to day bemoan..

O Cybele ! great mother throned on high !
Disdain not thou to bend thy pitying eye
Upon a mortal maiden bowed with grief :
Salve, if thou canst, my sorrow with relief !

Yet vainly I thy charity implore :
For this one medicine alone could heal,
Could'st thou my Atys' doom repeal ;
My joy with him is stabbed and breathes no more.

This now, my Atys ! this alone remains,
One solace bitter-sweet ;
To join when Philomel complains
In unison in dirges meet :
Outpouring oft the votive tear,
Libation to thy worshipped name ;
Appeasing with the perfumed flame
Thy shade that sadly haunts Cocytus drear ;
While slowly wears away the weary year.
Alack, alack-a-day !
The hours that late did swiftly bound,
And gaily frolic e'er the ground,
Now, leaden-footed, moping, crawl away.

Maidens.

Alas ! alas ! ah ! wel-a-way
Alas ! alas ! ah ! wel-a-way.

SCENE CLOSES.

SCENE VI.

The Tomb of Atys. Enter Adrastus with a drawn sword.

Adrastus.

Atys ! my friend ! my brother ! at thy tomb
I come to lay my hateful burden down :
No longer can my spirit bear to dwell
Within its blood-stained prison. O ye Fates !
Ye Fates unkind ! what an abhorred lot
Ye have apportioned me ! I am not one
By nature to delight in spilling blood,
E'en of an enemy : yet have I slain
A brother first ; and now one whom I loved
With all a brother's love. O tortured heart !
Soon shalt thou be at rest. O memory,
That with such anguish tearest my vexed soul !
Soon in kind Lethe's wave shalt thou be drowned.
Well had I ne'er been born ! why was I born ?
Unanswerable question ! What but grief
And pain have dogged my footsteps till this hour ?
O grief ! O pain ! I will escape you now ;

To Hades surely ye will not pursue !
Atys ! I come to thee ! Not long alone
Shalt thou retrace among the dismal shades
Thy melancholy way. Thou wilt forgive
The man who sacrificed no brutish bull,
But his own body at thy honoured tomb,
And left the light, to be thy fere for aye.
O speed me, Hermes ! and accept a part
In this outpouring of my votive blood !
O Earth ! without regret a last farewell
Of thee I take ; and look my last upon thee.
Fair art thou when thou smilest ; wondrous fair :
And passing lovely is the garb thou wearest
To greet the glowing kisses of the sun,
And mark thy gladness in his hot embrace.
But not for me thou smilest : I have found
Small comfort on thy cold and flinty breast :
A hard stepmother hast thou been to me !
I spurn thee ! and the ever-brimming cup
Of bitterness thou still would'st have me drink
I here spill out : one pang shall end all pain !
Farewell ye skies ! Atys, I follow thee !

Stabs himself and falls upon the tomb.

THE END.

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